

REMEMBERING SEAN O'SHEA

Madam President, on a separate topic, I want to talk about a friend of mine who just passed away. He was a selfless son of Chicago who did a lot of good for a lot of people.

Sean O'Shea was a political science major at DePaul University in Chicago when he was chosen to intern in the White House Office of Cabinet Affairs under President Clinton.

Mitch Dudek recently wrote a beautiful obituary in the Chicago Sun-Times. The first line reads:

Sean O'Shea had an endearing quality that, combined with grit and chutzpah, served as a lock-picking device of sorts on doors leading from his South Side home all the way to the White House.

Kris Balderston, who was Sean's first boss in the White House, recalled his first impressions. I will substitute some of the more colorful language.

He said:

I'm not exaggerating. The guy walked in our office and I think within the first day we were like, "Who the [bleep] is this kid?" He was amazing.

He totally stood out from every intern we ever had. He was like "mentorship? I know what I'm doing here," and he wasn't kidding. People would ask, "How old is he?" And I'd tell them, "You don't want to know."

He was the son of Irish immigrants and didn't know anyone. And he was just funny and personal and a real doer.

And everyone in the White House, from the President and Mrs. Clinton on down, fell in love with Sean O'Shea. Sean made such an impression that after he graduated, he was offered a full-time job as a liaison between the White House and several Cabinet Agencies. He was then in his early twenties.

After the White House, Sean served as top aide to Senator Hillary Clinton and handled domestic appropriations bills, transportation and infrastructure. He was an adviser on the Northern Ireland peace process.

He then went back home to Illinois to serve as deputy chief of staff to former Governor Pat Quinn, overseeing tens of billions of dollars in transportation and other capital improvement projects. He also helped pass marriage equality in my State of Illinois.

In hindsight, maybe Sean packed so much into such a short span because he would not be given the gift of a long life. He passed away last month of brain cancer at the age of 46.

Sean Francis Patrick O'Shea grew up on the South Side of Chicago, the youngest of Joe and Mary O'Shea's four kids. His parents were both born in Ireland, and they met at a dance in Chicago. Like many immigrant parents, Joe and Mary taught their kids to be proud of their heritage and to be grateful they were Americans. Sean's dad worked for the Chicago water department as an operating engineer. His mom worked in the Office of the Cook County Assessor.

Joe O'Shea was an accordion player and past president of the Chicago chapter of the Irish Musicians Association—God bless him—who insisted that all

four of their children learn Irish dancing.

One of Joe's proudest moments was in 2000, when Sean was asked if he could recommend any Irish musicians from Chicago to play at President Clinton's final St. Patrick's Day in the White House. Sean put in a plug for his dad and some dancers from the Irish dance school he attended in Chicago. He and his sister were able to watch as their dad played for the President and First Lady.

Sean also was that rare South Sider who was a Chicago Cubs fan, which is a big deal in Chicago. He was a regular at Cubs spring training in Arizona with his friends from WGN television and radio. He never missed the big game, which ranged from opening day to game 7 of the World Series, to any random Tuesday when the Cubs were well out of playoff contention. He loved the sport, the Cubs, and Wrigley Field, and to experience those days with his family and friends.

Sean was incredibly proud to have helped make Kerry Wood Cubs Field—which has given countless Chicago children the chance to play baseball—a reality during his time in the Governor's office.

He also loved people. Sean's husband Sebastian said they could go into a restaurant or bar where neither of them knew anyone, and by the time they left, Sean knew everyone and had the phone numbers of 10 new friends in his pocket. As one of Sean's friends said, "He left every room better than when he came in."

But what Sean loved most of all was helping others. He was a good, honorable man who believed that government could make life better for people and that public service was a privilege. He could often be heard saying, "How can I help?" He had a tremendous impact on the lives of people in Chicago, in Illinois, across America, and beyond. His contributions will make a difference for years to come, and he will be deeply missed.

Sean's funeral mass was held at Old St. Pat's Parish Church in Chicago. The church was filled with hundreds of floral arrangements and packed with his friends and countless people whose lives he touched. The last song they played, of course, was an Irish tune called "The Parting Glass." It is about a man who is leaving his friends behind. It includes the lines:

Come fill to me the parting glass. Good night and joy be with you all.

That is how Sean would want to be remembered—as a good man who used his short time on Earth to make the world better and bring joy to so many people.

Loretta and I send our deepest condolences to Sean's husband Sebastian Contreras, Jr.; his mother Mary; his siblings, Michael, Daniel, and Colleen; his niece and nephew, Declan and Delaney; and to Sean's friends—too numerous to count. May you find comfort in your memories.

DREAM ACT

Madam President, they say to me, to be an effective Senator, you have to be patient, but what I am about to describe tests that theory.

It has been 22 years since I introduced the DREAM Act.

The best chance we ever had to pass it came to mind as I listened to the Republican leader a few minutes ago talking about the horrors of fentanyl and drugs that are crossing our borders and recount the numbers of people who are showing up at our borders as well. It brought back my memory of something called the Gang of 8—four Democrats and four Republicans—including John McCain, LINDSEY GRAHAM, Senator Flake, Senator RUBIO, Senator SCHUMER, Senator BENNET of Colorado, Senator MENENDEZ, and myself. We worked for almost a year to put together a comprehensive immigration reform that was long overdue. It included border security at a level unseen in America ever. We were prepared to invest billions of dollars to make our border safe.

We passed this bill with, I think, 68 votes here on the floor of the Senate. I thought, finally, after 30 years of talking about immigration and batting it back and forth between Democrats and Republicans, we are finally going to do something on a bipartisan basis. We took that measure and sent it over to the Republican-led House of Representatives. They refused to even consider it—refused to consider it.

So when I hear concerns and complaints today that our border just isn't safe enough, I agree. But I ask those who are complaining: Where were you when we brought this bipartisan measure to the floor, which had so much enforcement in it and really would have given us a safer situation today and for years to come?

We can do that again.

I agree completely with Senator MCCONNELL that the drug crisis in America is serious, not just in Kentucky but in my State of Illinois and in yours, too, and all across this Nation. I also understand that there are too many people presenting themselves at the border believing they are going to somehow find their way into this country.

I have met with many of them who were brought on buses to the city of Chicago. You should hear their stories. These are not people who are out trying to deceive the system or cheat the laws of America. They are desperate people—desperate for the safety of themselves and their children, desperate for an opportunity to have hope and a future.

You sit down with them and think: How could they be much different than my mother, who was an immigrant to this country at the age of 2? She came here with her family looking for a better life. She found it, and because she found it, I did too.

That story is the story of America. Immigration is the story of America.